

**Questionnaire for Senior Pastor Candidate**  
**FBC Barstow**  
**Stephen Reynolds**

**Introductory note:** As a Southern Baptist, I hold to the *Baptist Faith & Message (2000)* as my Statement of Faith. While the *BFM* is not comprehensive on some of the topics covered below and allows for some interpretation and nuance, I consider the viewpoints found in it to be balanced and clear on essential beliefs. As a pastor, I am committed to keeping the essential doctrines first and foremost in my ministry and not allowing differences of interpretation to divide the local church. I have pastored and ministered among SBC congregations of varying views on some of the issues below with no major conflicts or unnecessary division.

**1. Explain salvation, its various components, and its application.**

Salvation only comes through faith in Jesus Christ. I believe the “minimum” requirements of salvation are clearly explained in Scripture. Romans 10:9, 13 says, “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.... For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Likewise, in Acts 16:31, Paul and Silas reply to the question, “What must I do to be saved?” with the answer, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.” Therefore, the Bible clearly states that the minimum requirement for salvation is belief and confession of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as Lord. True belief in Scripture involves repentance and faith, as preached by both John the Baptist (Mt 3:2) and Jesus (Mt 4:17); true belief also leads to action as “faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (Jas 2:17).

The application of salvation involves several components including:

- *Election:* Before creation, God chose those who would be saved according to his sovereign pleasure (Rom 8:28-30; 9:11-13; Eph 1:4-6).
- *Call:* The gospel is proclaimed, and God’s people respond (Jn 6:44; Rom 10:14; 1 Cor 1:9).
- *Regeneration:* sinners are born again to new spiritual life (Ezek 11:19-20; 36:26-27; Jn 3:1-8; Col 2:13-14). I believe this component occurs simultaneously alongside conversion (faith and repentance).
- *Conversion:* God’s people respond in faith and repentance (Acts 20:21). Without a response to the gospel, salvation does not occur.
- *Justification:* The saved are brought into right standing with God through forgiveness of sins and declaration of righteousness (Rom 3:20-38; 4:3-5; 8:30-34).
- *Adoption:* The saved receive membership into God’s family and the benefits of being in His family (Jn 1:12; Rom 8:14-17; Gal 4:4-7).
- *Sanctification:* Christians progressively grow into God’s image in Christ (Rom 6:11-19; Phil 3:13-14; Heb 12:23; Rev 21:27). Believers never attain perfection on this

earth but continually grow in Christ. Sanctification begins at salvation, continues throughout life, and completes at glorification.

- *Perseverance*: Those who are truly saved remain saved (Jn 6:38-40; 10:27-29; Phil 1:6).
- *Glorification*: When Christ returns, believers will be resurrected to new bodies and a renewed creation (Rom 8:19-23; 1 Cor 15:12-58; 1 Thess 4).

## **2. Explain your views on baptism and the Lord's Supper.**

I believe that Scripture establishes two ordinances: baptism and the Lord's Supper. These were practiced and taught by Christ and practiced by the early church. I believe that baptism and the Lord's Supper are physical, symbolic acts which represent spiritual realities ('enacted parables').

Baptism is a symbolic act designed for believers. Biblically, it was practiced by John the Baptist (Mt 3:1-12), Jesus Christ (Mt 3:13-17), and the early church (Acts 2:38, 41). Practically, it involves the immersion of the believer in water (Mk 1:5, 10). Theologically, baptism symbolizes the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom 6:1-11; Col 2:11-12), the believer's participation in the death of sin and resurrection to new life (Rom 6:1-11; Col 2:11-12), and the cleansing of sin (Acts 22:16; Titus 3:5). Baptism does not save an individual but is an act of public acknowledgment of salvation. I deny the practice of infant baptism.

The Lord's Supper, likewise, is designed for Christians and does not save. It is a symbolic act whereby believers remember and celebrate the death of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 11:26). I believe that Christ is *symbolically* present in the Lord's Supper and not *physically* present. Therefore, I reject the positions of transubstantiation (Roman Catholic) and consubstantiation (Lutheran) where Christ is physically a part of the Supper.

While both of these positions affirm a symbolic meaning of baptism and the Lord's Supper, I believe symbolism is powerful throughout Scripture and in the life of the church. Neither of these ordinances should be considered an afterthought to the church but should be practiced regularly and meaningfully.

## **3. What is your view on spiritual gifts (tongues) and their functions today?**

Scripture teaches that the Holy Spirit provides various gifts in the church for the benefit of unity and growth (1 Cor 12:7, 11, 21). The New Testament includes several lists which include spiritual gifts and gifted people such as apostles (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11), prophets / prophecy (Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:8-10, 28; Eph 4:11), teachers / teaching (Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:28), evangelists (Eph 4:11), pastor-teachers (Eph 4:11), servants / service (Rom 12:6-8; 1 Pet 4:11), speaking (1 Pet 4:11), miracles (1 Cor 12:8-10, 28), healing (1 Cor 12:8-10, 28), helps (1 Cor 12:28), administration (1 Cor 12:28), tongues (1 Cor 12:8-10, 28), interpreting tongues (1 Cor 12:8-10), words of wisdom (1 Cor 12:8-10),

words of knowledge (1 Cor 12:8-10), faith (1 Cor 12:8-10), distinguishing spirits (1 Cor 12:8-10), encouragement (Rom 12:6-8), contribution / giving (Rom 12:6-8), leadership (Rom 12:6-8), mercy (Rom 12:6-8), marriage (1 Cor 7:7), and celibacy (1 Cor 7:7). These demonstrate that Paul was not attempting an exhaustive list, and much overlap exists among the lists as some gifts. I believe the biblical point is that healthy churches include various giftings and variously gifted members. We must always remember that God distributes gifts for the building up of the church (1 Cor 14:12; 1 Pet 4:10). They are not distributed for selfish gain or personal prosperity. Church leaders should encourage members to know and use their giftings for the glory of God in the building of His church.

Regarding the “miraculous” gifts (prophecy (1 Cor 14:24-25), miracles (1 Cor 12:10), healing (Acts 3:10), casting out demons (Acts 19:11-13, 17), and speaking in tongues (Acts 2:7)), a few points can be made. All gifts of the Holy Spirit are miraculous in the sense that they are direct activities of God empowered by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:11). Nonetheless, some gifts are often considered miraculous in the sense that they are less common and inspire more awe and wonder in Scripture (i.e. speaking in tongues). These gifts are never presented as required for salvation and not all Christians in the Bible had these. Further, there can be differing explanations as to what constitutes these gifts. Finally, regarding whether these miraculous gifts exist today, I can make a couple of statements. First, I do not presume that God *does not* work in similar ways today as he did in the past; I do not see overwhelming biblical evidence that some gifts have ceased. However, I also do not presume that God *must* work in the same way today as he did in the past. I have never personally been in the presence of some of these giftings and this leads me to believe that these gifts remain less common (if they are present at all). As a church, we must practice humility and discernment when recognizing spiritual gifts.

Spiritual gifts should neither be neglected nor abused. I believe Scripture is complete and final. Therefore, no spiritual gifts (such as prophecy) “add to” or “take away” from biblical revelation. Ultimately, Christians are commanded to seek and pursue the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23) and receive the gifts of the Spirit.

#### **4. Define discipleship. What is the most important part of discipleship?**

Discipleship commonly refers to two things: first, it is the process by which someone becomes a follower of Jesus Christ and grows in Christlikeness. Second, it can refer to the act of “making disciples” in the Great Commission (Mt 28:19-20). Both of these are similar definitions and involve learning, obedience, and teaching. The concept of “growth in Christ which produces action” is the most important aspect of discipleship and includes several components.

A disciple is someone who follows Jesus Christ. Discipleship does not refer to a “higher level” of Christianity but is a necessary part of following Jesus. Believers are told to “grow” into Christ (Eph 4:15). This involves learning God’s Word and obedience to his

Word. It also involves growing alongside mature believers and following their example (Phil 3:17). Through prayer, study of God's Word, church attendance, Christian service, and evangelism and missions, believers grow in Christlikeness. Each of these acts are vital and necessary for Christian growth into the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23).

Scripture places discipleship ("making disciples") at the center of the local church: parents are to teach their children (Eph 6:4); mature believers are instructed to teach younger believers in both word and deed (2 Tim 2:2; Titus 2:4); church members are to encourage and instruct one another (Heb 3:13; 10:24-25); Christians are to use their spiritual giftings to build up the church (1 Pet 4:10); and missionaries are to teach the nations all that Christ commands (Mt 28:20). In these, the concept of "teaching" is central but is not simply confined to words but involves action. The local church is to be committed to making disciples who *know* Christ in discipleship, *love* Christ in worship, *enjoy* Christ in fellowship, *serve* Christ in ministry, and *share* Christ in evangelism and missions. I believe this happens as people come to Christ, learn their spiritual gifts, grow in holiness, and engage in ministry in the local and global church. As a pastor, I lead the local church in these areas and encourage my people to become more active in ministry of the church and in the community.

**5. Do you consider yourself Arminian or Calvinist? Explain your position thoroughly.**

Two points frame my answer to this question. First, and foremost, I believe Scripture is the only complete statement of theology and practice. Any theological "system" (including Arminianism or Calvinism), therefore, should be measured by the Bible above everything else. This means that, whenever I come across a biblical passage that teaches something contrary to what I previously believed, I am bound to obey and believe Scripture. This does not mean that other sources (including theologians and traditions) are altogether irrelevant but that they are not perfect. Second, I have learned through my historical-theological studies that terms such as Arminianism and Calvinism are interpreted differently depending on the person. Because of this, I do not regularly use these terms, especially in my preaching and teaching in the local church.

My view of the "doctrines of grace" (Calvinism) agrees fully with the *Baptist Faith and Message (2000)* which states, "Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is the glorious display of God's sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility. All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end. Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation."

Along these lines, I affirm both that (1) God is sovereign in salvation through election and (2) humans are morally responsible for sinful action and rejection of God. Although human freedom does not limit God's sovereignty, humans are without excuse due to their own sinful acts (Rom 1:18-32). Human inability does not limit human responsibility. Furthermore, God's sovereignty does not limit the indiscriminate preaching of the gospel in evangelism and missions as he has chosen these as his means of spreading the kingdom to all nations. Some may call this a "Calvinist" position; others call it "Arminian"; others call it some mixture of the two. Regardless, we should avoid dangerous extremes of any view including rejection of evangelism, teachings which deny calls to holiness, and human-centric theology.

As a pastor in multiple churches, I have served congregations of various views on the doctrines of grace. Pastorally, I believe that God's Word should be taught clearly and faithfully. As some texts of Scripture highlight God's sovereignty more centrally and others appeal to human faith and action, I preach both of these truths without any reservation. I have been blessed that this issue has never risen to conflict in any of the churches I have served. I believe our positions on this should be held graciously and humbly.

**6. Do you consider yourself egalitarian or complementarian? Explain your view on the role of women in ministry.**

Just as with my previous statement, I believe my view of women in pastoral roles is best summed by the *BFM (2000)*: "While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture." This statement is not comprehensive but does include a generally complementarian viewpoint of pastoral leadership. Beyond this, I affirm that both male and female were made in God's image and likeness (Gen 1:26-28). Therefore, both are equal in dignity and worth. Although the office of pastor is limited to men, this does not disqualify women from ministry and Christian service outside of this role. My wife graduated from seminary with a Master of Missiology degree, and I have valued her giftings and expertise in ministry. She has faithfully served alongside me in ministry as have other women.

My view is best exemplified in my previous experience as a pastor in Cuba, New Mexico. The church included both men and women at key leadership positions (including teaching roles, committees, and team leaders). Women were valued as important members and leaders within this church and served at various places, including as voices of wisdom and knowledge to me as the pastor. In my home, my wife is valued as a mature, wise believer in making decisions related to our home and our children. I do not believe a complementarian position should be used to abuse or belittle the value of women in both the home and the church. In recent years, we have seen numerous pastors across the nation fail because of unbalanced views related to the roles of men and women in ministry. I actively guard against sexual abuse, harassment, and devaluing

others based on gender, race, ethnicity, or social class. Nonetheless, I stand alongside Southern Baptists in biblical and doctrinal conviction.

## **7. What are your views on the Holy Spirit?**

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity and is fully God. Jesus commands his disciples to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, placing the Spirit alongside the Father and Son in divinity (Mt 28:19). Likewise, Scripture refers to the Holy Spirit with divine characteristics such as omniscience (1 Cor 2:10-11). Therefore, we should study and teach about the Holy Spirit, His person and His work.

I believe that the Holy Spirit is not a *thing* but is a *person* as Scripture refers to the Spirit as “He” (Jn 16:18) and the name “Parakletos” (“helper, counselor, or comforter”). Furthermore, we can grieve the Spirit just as we can grieve the Father and Son (Eph 4:30).

I believe in the work of the Holy Spirit. He empowers Christian life and service (Jn 6:63); he sanctifies believers (1 Cor 6:11; Titus 3:5); he reveals God’s truth and presence (2 Pet 1:21; Jn 1:32), guidance to believers (Acts 8:29), assurance of faith (1 Jn 4:13), and teaching (Jn 14:26); he unites God’s people (Acts 2:42-47). As such, I believe the Holy Spirit is vital for the church. We are not to abuse or neglect the Spirit. Dangerous extremes on both ends should be avoided. Finally, we are to receive gifts of the Spirit and pursue fruits of the Spirit.

## **8. How do you measure success in a local church?**

Many churches focus on measures of success that, while good, are not ultimate such as financial records, attendance, comfort, or participation in events. While some of these are tools of measuring success, none fully encompass what it means to be the people of God in a given place. I believe the best measure for success is *faithfulness*, and each of these other things may serve as tools to point towards this. As Jesus taught in the “Parable of the Talents,” faithfulness leads to fruitfulness (Mt 24:14-30). This faithfulness occurs in several areas.

God’s people are, first and foremost, to be faithful to Christ and his gospel, our “first love” (Rev 2:1-7) and “head” of the church (Eph 1:22-23). We are to know the gospel (2 Pet 3:18), live for the gospel (Phil 1:9-11), and preach the gospel (Mt 28:19-20; 2 Tim 4:2). Our first measure of success is how faithful we remain to the gospel of Jesus Christ in everything we do. As a church, we can measure this by how many of our people can articulate and share the gospel with others. Baptism numbers and records related to mission teams and evangelism may also be helpful tools in pointing to whether we are being faithful to Christ and his gospel in our community. We exist, as a church, to glorify God by preaching the gospel to all nations, beginning in our community.

Second, and similarly, the church is called to be faithful to Scripture. This includes proper leadership and teaching as well as proper function as the church. Biblically, Christ has given the church several primary functions including worship, discipleship, fellowship, ministry, evangelism, and missions. Each of these biblical functions can be witnessed in the early church in the book of Acts and beyond. Therefore, our measure of success is how faithful we are to these biblical functions. Helpful tools related to this may be worship attendance, Bible study and small group participation, mission teams, and ministry projects in the community. We can look to Scripture and test ourselves against the example of other believers and churches in these areas. Individually, we can measure this area by spiritual fruit (Gal 5:22-23).

Third, we are to be faithful to our statement of faith. As Southern Baptists, we have adopted a doctrinal statement which should guide us in belief and practice. I believe this statement provides helpful parameters for the local church. If we veer from this statement, we should ask why we have done so; if a new statement is issued or changes are made, we should ask whether or not we continue to agree with the changes in a biblical manner. This statement also helps us to see which issues are primary versus secondary for the individual and local church. We should not divide over minor disputes (1 Cor 1:10). Our faithfulness in this area can be measured by our treatment of each other and those who disagree with us. The tone of our church and committee meetings will also point to how faithful we are in this area.

Finally, the local church should be faithful to our vision and mission statement at the local level. All churches are called to glorify God by making disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19-20) (see explanation of discipleship in question 4). At the same time, local churches know their location and culture better than churches in another setting. Therefore, churches should understand their specific vision for their community and be committed to that vision. Ministers and ministry leaders should call their people to faithfulness to this shared vision, and ministry success can be gauged by this. The question should be asked: how has our church influenced our community, our nation, and our world? Some of the tools discussed above can be helpful for assessing this aspect of faithfulness. For example, how involved are our people in ministry and leadership positions? Furthermore, our budget will reflect where we place our values. Do we spend most of our money on our own comforts and pleasures or do we devote our resources to making disciples inside the church, in our community, and around the world?

**9. How do you measure unsuccess in a local church? When do you know you need to take action?**

Alongside the previous statement on how to measure success (see question 8 above), lack of success in the church can be measured by a lack of faithfulness to the areas mentioned: Christ and his gospel, Scripture, our statement of faith, and our mission and vision as the local church. The church must be united in these, and, when a minister or

ministry of the church deviates, the church should work together in correcting the error. Just as the tools mentioned above may be helpful for understanding our faithfulness, they can also point to a lack of faithfulness in one or more areas.

These areas are also listed in importance of when the pastor and church should act. When the gospel is at stake, we should correct the error immediately and decidedly as this is an area of first importance. Likewise, when Scripture is denied or abused, action should take place quickly. However, attention might be given to areas of interpretation which may be at play. Some biblical texts and teachings will involve some minor differences at times, and the church and minister can allow for these on some points (i.e. what kind of fish swallowed Jonah) and not on other points (i.e. Jesus Christ is God, Jn 1:1). On the third level, our statement of faith could also be open to points of interpretation (as some of my answers in this very document represent), but we should be clear on which of these are most vital. Finally, when our local church vision and mission aren't being followed, we should carefully question how and why the ministry or individual is not following this vision. The issue may call for minor changes within the ministry or leadership or it may call for a complete change or new direction.

Each of these (from primary issues to minor lack of success) should be treated with love and care for one another in the local church. The role of the pastor, while leading in possible changes based on unsuccess, involves doing so in grace and mercy. Just as we are instructed to pursue church discipline with an eye towards restoration (Mt 18:15-20), we should always address issues within the church with a heart for the gospel, bringing sinners to repentance and Christians to biblical faithfulness.

#### **10. How do you define success as a pastor?**

Once again, this answer is linked to the previous two questions (8 and 9). As church success is defined by faithfulness to Christ and the gospel, Scripture, our statement of faith, and local church mission and vision, the pastor should measure success by how he is leading his people in these areas.

First, is the pastor teaching and displaying the gospel? A pastor cannot be successful in ministry if his life is not centered on the gospel. This includes both his public and private life. He, first, must know and love Christ himself if he is to proclaim and display Christ to his people. Second, his ministry must be rooted in the same gospel that saved him. He can measure success by the gospel focus of both his life and ministry. Scripture teaches that his family is a good witness to this. Are his wife and children being continually drawn to the gospel through his leadership in the family? Or does a life of unfaithfulness push them away? Likewise, is his preaching and teaching centered on the gospel? Is he calling the lost to salvation and sinners to repentance in his preaching? Success as a pastor begins with a gospel-centeredness.

Second, and likewise, the pastor must be biblical. This means that the pastor must, first, fit the biblical qualifications of a pastor (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-16). If he fails in these qualifications he will not be successful as a pastor. These include instructions for both his private life with his family as well as his public life in the church and society. Once again, in many ways, the pastor's success can be measured by asking his wife, children, friends, church, and neighbors about his holiness and lifestyle. He should also teach Scripture faithfully from the pulpit as this is a central aspect to the role of pastor. Is his church growing in knowledge of Scripture?

Third, the pastor should be sound in doctrine (Titus 1:9). His success in ministry and teaching can be measured by how faithful he is to the church's statement of faith and practice. He should lead the church in this area and evaluate all ministries and leaders based on theological truthfulness. Once again, this should be done in humility and grace but also with conviction. The pastor should protect the flock from false teachings and teachers (Titus 1:10-16). Faithfulness in this area can be measured by how divided the church is on minor theological disputes.

Lastly, the pastor should be faithful to the church's vision and mission. One role of the pastor is to make sure the church is following what it sets out to do. This involves leading through possible change and recasting of vision. A successful pastor will do so with love for his people and community that the church can be successful. Ultimately, the pastor cares for his people with the heart of Christ and not with an eye toward selfish gain or popularity. Is the pastor casting a clear vision or are his people confused by the direction of the church? Are ministries and ministry leaders clear on their purpose and function in the church and community? These questions are helpful in assessing the pastor's faithfulness to the church's vision and mission.

#### **11. What would your top priority be during your first year at our church?**

My top priority during the first year at your church would be to *listen and learn*. A pastor must know his people, the culture of the church, and the culture of the community to effectively shepherd. Therefore, I will devote my first year to learning (a process that will continue throughout my ministry).

First, I will learn about my church members by building relationships and pastoral care. I believe recent events such as the pandemic have brought to light the need for pastoral care among church members. As communities and individuals were placed in isolation, we learned the value of things such as visitation and fellowship were made difficult (if not altogether impossible at times). I experienced this need firsthand with my recent health concerns, hospital visits, and treatment in complete isolation from my church family. As a new pastor, I will place priority on getting to know my congregation and caring for their needs.

Second, I will listen and learn from ministry staff, leaders, and committee members within the congregation. I will value their input as I learn the valuable ministries of the church and key needs among the congregation. As a new pastor, I must listen and learn from these leaders as we evaluate ministry needs and cast renewed vision for the future. Alongside these leaders, I will begin encouraging those not involved in the church and ministry leadership to become more involved.

Third, I will take time to learn the history of the church and listen to those who have been a part of the church for some time. As a student of church history, I have learned the value in understanding where churches have been to properly evaluate where we can go next. I will also listen and learn about the community as our church exists in a local setting. As a resident of a new place, I enjoy learning the culture around me and growing deep roots in the church and community. My family will begin efforts to be part of the broader Barstow community.

All of this “learning” will take place while continuing to preach faithfully, pray constantly, and settling-in to a new ministry and life setting. The process of learning will also include evaluation of where we have been and where we are going, planning for the future, and making necessary changes as ministry leaders and the congregation recognize needs. I believe this process will better establish myself and the congregation for long-term ministry.

**12. Tell us about a time when you have both successfully and unsuccessfully handled conflict.**

As a pastor and ministry leader, I have personal experience with conflict and have handled it both successfully and unsuccessfully at times. I believe conflict is an opportunity for growth as a minister and a church.

Generally, I have experienced successful conflict management in leading and moderating church business meetings and committee meetings. Inevitably, these will sometimes involve disagreement which could spiral into outright conflict and division. As a pastor, I learned to lead meetings prayerfully, humbly, and with a good sense of humor. I present church meetings as a time for the church and leaders to voice opinions while reminding others to respect differing views. My previous church held monthly business meetings which were attended by most of the congregation. We looked forward to these times and had to stop the meeting short at times because we were telling too many stories and jokes! They became one of my favorite times with my congregation each month.

Specifically, I learned to manage conflict early in my pastoral ministry with a musician in the church. One Sunday morning, this musician used their platform to passionately voice an opinion during a worship service and made the entire church uncomfortable. I immediately knew I would need to address the issue. Following the service, I first

discussed the issue with the worship leader who felt uncomfortable addressing the musician. We agreed that a conversation should occur over the purpose of worship and the Sunday morning service. We approached the musician and asked them to discuss the issue. As the pastor, I took the lead in explaining the problem, discussing how it could have been better addressed, and offering a firm yet gentle reminder of why we gather on a Sunday. We ended the discussion with a warning that future events like this will result in other discussions and the possibility of losing the position on the worship team. The musician was frustrated at first but saw our point as we carefully and calmly discussed the event with biblical wisdom. Further conflict was avoided because we addressed the problem, and nothing of the sort occurred again with this musician. From this, I learned the value of quickly addressing an issue, including other ministry leaders in conflict management, and offering biblical counsel.

I have also had times of unsuccessful conflict management in the church. One of the most memorable was very early in my ministry as a youth pastor. I had recently been ordained and was asked to help serve the Lord's Supper during a mid-week service. I arrived and helped serve but later learned that some members of the church had taken offense that I was wearing sandals in front of the church. I was approached about this issue by another church member and, frustrated, quickly offered my thoughts on "true worship" which doesn't depend on what is on my feet. My tone was harsh and proud. Later, my senior pastor addressed the event with me, and I remained unforgiving. My pastor, much more seasoned and wiser as a minister, gently reminded me that, although I was a youth pastor, this church member was also under my care as a pastor. He explained that I may be correct about idolatry and true worship but I was not acting "pastorally" in the moment of my response. I had not handled this minor conflict correctly, and it resulted in a difficult relationship for some time with the church member. Now, years later, I share this memory with young ministers to teach the difference between being "correct" and being a pastor. Pastors lead with humility, grace, and the ability to handle conflict in love.

### **13. How would you describe your leadership and team building skills?**

As a young person, I was often told that I had a leader's personality and gifting with my approachable attitude, sense of humor, and communication skills. I was chosen as a leader in my school and youth group beginning in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and have been in various levels of leadership since that time. In college, I served as a volunteer leader at the Baptist Student Union for two years before being selected as the local and state-wide BSU president during my senior year. Through church leadership experience beginning in my junior year of college until the present day I have grown in many ways in Christian leadership including building and leading teams of volunteers, planning and sharing vision, and communicating biblical truth. In my current job, I have especially grown in servant leadership. Each of these experiences have encouraged my growth as a leader.

My leadership style embraces several skills and commitments. First, I am committed to relational leadership and working on a team. God has given me an extrovert personality that drives me toward groups of people. I prefer working on teams rather than alone. In my previous church in Cuba, NM, I was the only member of the staff and, in a town of 700 people, would sometimes go days without visits in my office. I learned that I did not enjoy this and committed to visiting others and developing teams of people to work alongside. As a youth pastor in California, I had several interns working under my care, and we built an effective team to lead children from various backgrounds and experiences. I learned through this experience that I, as a pastor, will not be able to complete every task by myself or effectively minister to every person. Because of this, I surrounded myself with talented, mature leaders. I have learned to recognize people's interests and giftings which can lead to well-balanced, effective teams.

Second, I am committed to consistent communication. In my first church ministry job as a youth pastor, I quickly learned the value of communicating vision to those in my ministry. I sent weekly texts and emails to parents and guardians to keep them informed; I taught weekly Bible studies to my students; and I regularly reported to my pastor, deacons, and the church. I also learned the value of volunteer committees, albeit through negative experiences when I would not hold enough of them! I continued this commitment as a senior pastor. I would meet monthly with key leaders in the church, established more regular deacon's meetings, preached a yearly vision series, and continually learned from more seasoned ministers in the church. My strongest ministry giftings are preaching and teaching, and communication is central to my leadership.

Third, I am a servant leader. My current job at a children's home has especially drawn out this aspect of my leadership. My first call to ministry had come years earlier while washing tables at a children's camp in Alaska, and my wife and I have always been passionate about caring for children in need. Over the last two years, I have served children in every way imaginable from encouraging them when they are hurting, cleaning up after them when everyone else was in bed, caring for them when they were sick, and regularly sacrificing my own interests and comfort for their own. I have loved serving them and showing them the love of Christ while teaching them the gospel. This style of leadership carries over into my role as a pastor. Being a pastor isn't primarily about standing on a stage and talking for an hour each Sunday but about serving your people throughout the week. In Cuba, NM, I would wake up early after it snowed to shovel sidewalks (a task I don't prepare to do much in Barstow, CA!); I would spend my earliest hours each Sunday preparing the building and classrooms; I served church members by chopping firewood for them in the winter; I served the community by leading my Sunday school class in providing Thanksgiving meals each year. These have been valuable and blessed times of ministry for me, and I enjoy serving my people and community.

**14. What is your weekly regiment for preaching and developing sermons?**

My weekly preaching preparation involves four parts which typically involves between 9 and 12 hours of study throughout the week. I divide these sections based on my office hours and ministry calendar (counseling sessions, visitation, meetings, etc.). While I do not do this to the neglect of other pastoral activities, I believe preaching is one of the primary functions of the pastor and consistently devote time to study and preparation of sermons.

A copy of my sermon preparation method can be found at [this link](#). The four parts of my sermon preparation method are (1) exegesis, (2) theological reflection, (3) application, and (4) sermon writing. In exegesis, I answer the question “what does the text say?” Specifically, what did this text mean to the original audience? This part of sermon preparation usually involves the greatest amount of study and time at the beginning of my week. Second, in theological reflection, I ask “what does the Bible as a whole say about this text?” In this section, I look at key doctrines and theological themes taught in my text which often reveals the particular applications to my congregation. In the third part of sermon preparation, I apply this text to my audience through much prayer. By the end of this section, I know my main points of preaching as well as applications to my people. Finally, I write a manuscript of the sermon, notes, and any visual aids needed. I have found that I preach well from a manuscript but sometimes from a shorter page of notes as well.

This entire process is designed to be (1) faithful to the text of Scripture, (2) doctrinally sound, and (3) applicable to my congregation. I demonstrate a great love for Scripture and the gospel in my preaching, and my passion comes across just as much as my careful treatment of the text. I believe God’s people deserve thoughtful, biblical preaching on a weekly basis.

#### **15. How do you plan your sermon topics?**

My regular practice of preaching involves expository study of books of the Bible but also includes some topical series at points in the year. I have preached expository series on books including Jonah, Ruth, Esther, and Hosea in the Old Testament and Philippians, Jude, and Matthew in the New Testament (to name a few). I have also preached topical series related to the church ordinances, the person and work of Christ, church vision and mission, and special series around holidays. This design of regular expository series with some topical series is intended to ground the church in biblical truth (including topics we may not wish to cover at times) as well as address key needs at points in the year. I believe God, in his infinite wisdom, designed His Word, and I desire to follow that design as closely as possible. Pastorally, this allows me to teach on many topics in my preaching. For example, while preaching through Philippians, I addressed topics related to discipleship, sanctification, the end times, church unity, the person of Christ, evangelism and missions, and salvation.

My sermon planning involves other pastoral staff, ministry leaders, and the congregation as well. I ask others what they would like to study, areas of needed growth in the congregation, and particular questions we would like answered. I will especially work alongside the worship pastor in planning services that are biblically faithful and applicable to our people.

Lastly, I do not allow a sermon calendar to hinder me from pastoral sermons at important seasons in the church. On some occasions, I change a sermon plan because of a particular need. For instance, our church experienced several deaths within a short period of time some years ago, and I felt the need to preach on that topic as a means of encouragement to my congregation. I changed my sermon calendar and preached on John 11 to my people.

#### **16. Explain your views on marriage, divorce, and remarriage.**

As a pastor, I approach these issues with much pastoral concern as well as biblical conviction. The church should stand strong in their communities as a biblical picture of the family. Regarding marriage, I agree fully with the *BFM (2000)* which states: "Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. It is God's unique gift to reveal the union between Christ and His church and to provide for the man and the woman in marriage the framework for intimate companionship, the channel of sexual expression according to biblical standards, and the means for procreation of the human race."

Several aspects of this definition stand out: First, marriage is "God's gift" and is therefore created by and guided by God (Gen 2:18-25). Second, marriage is between one man and one woman, not between "two men" or "two women" (homosexuality) or "one man and several women" or "one woman and several men" (polygamy). Third, marriage is a covenant commitment for a lifetime which should never be broken (remember God's commitments to covenants in Scripture and the punishment for breaking His covenant such as in Deut 28). Finally, marriage is a picture of Christ's love for the Church (Eph 5:22-33) and should be treated as such by Christians.

Based on this biblical reasoning, I believe divorce to be sinful except in cases of biblical rationale. I believe there to be three biblical reasons for divorce (two explicitly stated in Scripture and one which I believe to be implied): adultery (Mt 5:27-32; 19:1-12), abandonment (1 Cor 7:15), and abuse (I see this as the same as abandonment as the marriage covenant and vows have been broken). There are many debates over these grounds and what counts for biblical reasoning for divorce. The first solution to marital issues must be to seek reconciliation through biblical counseling (Mt 18:15-17), repentance, and much prayer. Divorce is serious and should be taken seriously. As Christians, this should be the last resort and only for the reasons stated above; no other reasons are sanctioned by Scripture, and, therefore, no other reasons are encouraged by myself as a pastor. In any case, divorce should not be a decision made lightly, and

Christians should consult church leaders who can pray with and guide the believer through it. I approach this issue carefully, prayerfully, and humbly as a pastor.

Finally, in the case of remarriage, the question is complicated and has drawn different conclusions from various pastors whom I respect for faithfulness to Scripture. Therefore, you will likely hear conflicting answers given the church and pastor. I make two conclusions. First, *in the case of divorce on biblical grounds*, I believe remarriage to be permitted as long as the believer was not the offending party (the one committing adultery, abandoning his/her spouse or abusing his/her spouse). Second, *in the case of divorce not on biblical grounds or in the case that the believer was the offending party* (mentioned above), remarriage is referred to as adultery in Jesus's teaching (Mt 5:31-32). As a pastor, I have yet to perform a wedding in this case as I believe I will be held responsible for this decision (Jas 3:1).

I do not believe divorce to be the "unpardonable sin" in Scripture as the blood of Christ covers all sin, including divorce (Mt 26:28; Mk 3:28; Acts 10:43; 1 Jn 1:9). Forgiveness of sin occurs through repentance and faith in Christ. Therefore, all sin is unpardonable without faith in Jesus Christ. Divorce is not the unforgivable sin just as much as murder, lying, stealing, or cheating is not unforgivable; lack of faith in Jesus Christ is the truly unforgivable sin. In every case of sin (including divorce and remarriage in unbiblical cases), I proceed pastorally and prayerfully and encourage repentance. While I guard against encouraging this practice as a pastor, I know that many of my church members and attendees will have a history of divorce. I will address this with biblical conviction and clarity but also with grace. Ultimately, the church should seek restoration of the family through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

#### **17. Explain your views on sex, gender and the LGBTQIA2S+ movement?**

This question relates to the previous discussion on marriage. I believe that Genesis 1-2 establishes the Christian belief of the creation of humanity, gender, and human sexuality. Regarding gender, God made male and female from the beginning (Gen 1:26-28). Thus, gender is a blessing from God. Marriage is defined as being between one male and one female by God's design (Gen 2:18-25). Marriage is an earthly picture of the gospel, where the husband is to love and serve his wife just as Christ loves and serves his church (Eph 5:22-33). God not only created humanity but intentionally designed our relationships, including sexual relationships. Sexual sin, including lust, adultery, incest, and homosexuality, are rebellion against God's design and are clearly evil in the sight of God and his people (i.e. Lev 18; Mt 5:27-32; 1 Cor 5-7). The church, thus, should stand strong in the face of cultural pressures regarding gender, human sexuality, and marriage. Likewise, the church should stand against sexual sin and sexual abuse in every form. As believers, we are not afraid of engaging cultural sins. While we do so in love, we must also do so boldly and truthfully.

**18. Where do you stand on the doctrine of the end times? Are you a pre-millennialist, Amillennialist or post-millennialist? Why?**

My general view of the end times regards the biblical teaching that God is in control over the future. There are biblical events which I affirm including (1) the return of Jesus Christ (Mt 24), (2) the judgment of all humanity (1 Thess 5:2; 2 Thess 2:1-2; 2 Pet 3:10; Rev 20:10-15), (3) the resurrection of the dead (Jn 5:28-29), and (4) eternal reward for believers and punishment for unbelievers.

Another aspect of the end times involves the teaching on the millennium in Revelation 20:2-5. Because this debate involves a small amount of the text, I believe we should, like several debates in questions above, be humble and gracious in our beliefs on this topic. I have, however, studied the debate and even taught a Sunday evening lesson on the various views.

I begin by explaining what I believe each position to hold. First, amillennials (with the Greek prefix “a” meaning “no”) believe that Revelation 20:4-5 is already occurring or has already occurred and that there is *no future millennium*. In this view, much of Revelation is symbolic, Satan is already bound, and Christ’s return will initiate the final resurrection, judgment, and new creation at the same time. Second, postmillennialism (with the Greek prefix “post” meaning “after”) holds that Jesus will return *after* the millennium. In this view, Christian influence in the world will grow so tremendously and usher in a time of peace and righteousness (the millennium) which will last for a long time before Christ’s return; at that point, all will be resurrected, judged, and the new creation will occur. This is an optimistic view of world history and the church. Finally, premillennialism (with the Greek prefix “pre” meaning “before”) argues that Jesus will return *before* the millennium. There are two secondary interpretations of this position: *historical premillennialism* holds that Christians will endure a Great Tribulation before Jesus returns and then the millennium will take place; *pre-tribulational premillennialism* holds that Jesus will return before the Great Tribulation and rescue his church, will return again after the Tribulation, and will reign with his people. This second view is held by dispensationalists.

There are numerous arguments for each of these positions, and godly Christians have held all three in history. Four conclusions about *all three* need to be made: First, all three views claim support from both Scripture and church history. While some claim to be more literal to the text than others and postmillennialism is virtually extinct in the contemporary church, all three maintain this argument. Second, all three views believe Jesus will return, gather his people, and judge the world. These, I believe, are the most important beliefs of the end times based on the New Testament evidence. Third, and based on the previous two points, we can believe differently on this debate and remain brothers and sisters in Christ. Finally, regardless of position, all Christians will one day rejoice when our savior comes.

With all of this said, I have held both the amillennial and premillennial positions at different points in my studies and ministry. In recent years, I have become more convinced of the historical premillennial position based on (1) a more literal interpretation of Revelation 20 (and the rest of the book), (2) other passages which indicate a coming day of “greatness” before eternity (i.e. Ps 72; Isa 11:6-11; 65:20; Zech 14:5-17), and (3) warnings that Christians will endure great persecution throughout the New Testament as well as encouragements to persevere (as a rejection of pre-tribulational premillennialism). I personally hold these positions with a humble attitude and have never engaged in harsh rhetoric on my view. This debate, in my opinion, should not divide believers and churches.